



Oct 22 2005

Langley proposes new rules for homes

By BREEANA LAUGHLIN

The city of Langley is proposing to lessen the impacts of development on the community and environment by adopting "low impact development" rules.

"Low impact development is intended to help local governments, developers and environmentalists reduce the impacts of development on the environment," said city planner Alice Schisel.

Low impact development, or LID, is a storm-water management and land-development strategy that emphasizes the conservation of on-site natural features.

At the last Langley City Council meeting, Schisel said outside planning experts were welcoming Langley's approach toward development. She read a letter from Linda Lyshall, who works for the Puget Sound Action Team, a partnership of state agencies and tribal and local governments. The team is working with local governments across the region to help the measures in place.

Lyshall encouraged the city to move forward with its plans.

"We applaud the planning advisory board's efforts to preserve the aesthetic and ecological values of Langley, and for their forward thinking on future development," Schisel recounted.

Low impact development works to keep as many natural characteristics in place to soak up storm-water runoff from development, rather than relying solely on drains, pipes and large collection basins. These practices help control storm water by keeping it close to where it originates.

Low-impact measures include preserving trees and other native vegetation, and reducing the amount of hard surfaces being developed on the site being developed.

To launch the new approach, Langley is using the Low Impact Development Technical Guidance Manual. And the city's planning advisory board wants the guidance manual to be folded into the city's code.

"We will require adherence to low-impact development measures before before more conventional measures can be considered in planning for storm-water management and in constructing roads," Schisel said.

"We have some pretty good codes in place right now," said Rick Hill, director of public works. "This just makes our codes that much stronger."

The low-impact measures will improve environmental controls on the site being developed, and on surrounding sites.

"When developers do studies, they don't just look at their piece of property," Hill said. "They have to look at their property and to areas downstream to it, all the way to the outfall."

Controlling storm-water runoff is one of the great challenges of development.

The state Department of Ecology estimates that one-third of all the polluted waters in the state are polluted by storm-water runoff.

When developers clear forests and put in roads, parking lots, roofs and other hard surfaces, rainfall can no longer soak into the ground.

When storm water runs over roads, parking lots and other hard surfaces, it picks up pollutants along the way and carries many of those substances into streams, wetlands and bays.

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